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For information

Country note**

Albania

Summary

The Executive Director presents the country note for Albania for a programme of cooperation for the period 2001 to 2005.

The situation of children and women

1. Albania, one of the poorest countries in Europe, continues to undergo a turbulent period of institutional and economic change. Emerging from 40 years of isolation to open elections in 1992, Albania initially experienced rapid economic growth that was short lived. The nationwide anarchy that followed the collapse of financial pyramid schemes in 1997, preceded by a period filled with many challenges, including a severe polio epidemic in 1996, are examples of the heavy burden that the country has had to bear. The lack of resources, inflation, unemployment and income inequality became common features of the situation.

2. The influx of up to 500,000 refugees from Kosovo (spring 1999) placed an additional social burden on Albania's weakened economy. Despite the rapid return of refugees three months later, the economic and social impact on Albania was dramatic, with investments in the social sectors drastically reduced. However, the Kosovo crisis mobilized Albanian society to support refugees. Albanian solidarity with those in need has generated a renewed sense of confidence and national pride, including social sector workers and young people. Despite the deterioration of basic social services, the Ministry of Health estimates that between 1994 and 1998, the infant mortality rate has declined from 34 to 20.5 per 1,000 live births, and the maternal mortality rate is down from 40.5 to almost 22 per 100,000 live births. The actual rates are believed by many to be much higher. Acute respiratory infections are the main cause of infant mortality. Malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies remain serious public health problems, especially iodine deficiency. In northern Albania, a 1997 assessment revealed that almost 18 per cent of children

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** An addendum to the present report containing the final country programme recommendation will be submitted to the Executive Board for approval at its second regular session of 2000.

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under the age of six years were under weight, with a 22 per cent stunting rate and a more than 7 per cent rate of wasting.

3. Socio-economic hardship is rolling back a tradition of almost universal access to education. According to official statistics, between 1994 and 1998, pre-school attendance dropped from 60 to 39 per cent, and from 100 to 94 per cent in primary schools, although drop-out rates are estimated to be much higher. Poor quality of education, low morale among teachers, chronic under-funding and the perceived lack of relevance of the curriculum are all cited as determining factors.

4. Drug abuse, prostitution and juvenile delinquency are increasing rapidly, as are the numbers of children living or working on the street. Education authorities have reported increasing absence among children who are peddling goods and offering other services on the streets. Underlying this situation of children is the social inequity facing women in many places in this country that for so many years was isolated from the outside world.

Lessons learned from past cooperation

5. The Government's principal preoccupation with structural macroeconomic development has resulted in less attention to the social sectors. UNICEF advocacy and technical support will be required in the institutional development and capacity-building of national partners dealing with children's and women's rights. UNICEF should support the dissemination of information, preventive and rehabilitative services, and the establishment of child strategies in relation to labour, juvenile justice, violence and children living on the streets.

6. The development of "child-friendly spaces" during the recent refugee crisis underscored that the integration of services for children was key to cost-effectiveness and efficiency. UNICEF will build on this experience in the development of integrated community services for children and youth in Albania.

7. The destruction of schools and health facilities during the 1997 crisis, often by those they had served, highlighted the need to build a sense of community and youth ownership. The need for a civil society coalition for children's rights in support of this effort is evident. To achieve this, the capacity of Albanian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the media will be strengthened.

8. Albanian culture strongly values children, which can be a force for social development and children's rights. This will be reflected in UNICEF programme planning and implementation. Promotion of the role of the family and family-based support mechanisms for children will be a priority.

9. Generally weak national applied social research and analysis, together with the outdated statistical methodologies, limit the Government's abilities to formulate and implement viable and sustainable social policies and strategies for children's rights. Therefore, UNICEF will seek to enhance the capacities of both governmental and non-governmental institutions to collect and analyse social data, and to monitor the situation of children.

Proposed country programme strategy

10. The 2001-2005 country programme will be built around the rights-based approach and guided by the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The recommendations on the programme have been agreed upon at consultations with the Government and other partners.

11. In order to take into account the complexity and specificity of the social situation in Albania and foster a holistic approach to children's issues, the new country programme structure will be designed around children's life cycle, within an overall integrated community approach. Intersectoral priorities related to the rights of children will be addressed in a convergent manner, with due attention to the political, economic, social and other factors affecting children at certain stages of their life.

12. The programme will focus on the cross-cutting issues that span the stages of the life cycle. It will promote the key role of the family in the protection and development of the child. Activities will aim to empower families through improved information on child-related issues and the development of appropriate governmental policies and social development strategies. The gender perspective will be also streamlined on a cross-sectoral basis. The programme will build on its current strategies to support the Government in the promotion of women's health, advocate for an increased role of women in both families and society, and further strengthen women's associations and networks. The development of women's centres providing emergency shelter, first aid and counselling for women victims of violence and neglect will also be supported.

13. Programme strategies will include: (a) advocacy for the reform of social policies and legal frameworks related to health, education, juvenile justice and social protection

for children and women; (b) capacity-building of national partners, with an emphasis on the monitoring of children's rights; (c) the empowerment of children, adolescents and families through information, education and communication activities; (d) support to accessible social services through cost-effective and decentralized approaches; and (e) the provision of knowledge to youth to encourage their participation in the social development and promote healthy lifestyles.

14. The *early childhood care and development* (ECCD) programme will encompass activities that ensure the rights of the youngest children to life and to unhampered physical, psychological, social, emotional and cognitive development. It will support the development of the Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses adapted to the Albanian context. Attention will be given to a reform of the primary health care (PHC) system in selected areas. Interventions will be supported that address micronutrient deficiencies, including intensified efforts to achieve universal salt iodization and prevent iron deficiency anaemia. Activities related to ECCD will be supported through the mobilization of families and communities. Support will also be extended to the adaptation and application of the Better Parenting Initiative.

15. The *development and participation for children and youth* programme will include interventions aimed at guaranteeing school-age children and adolescents their rights to development and participation. Based on the recommendations of the recently concluded education sector study, the programme will support reform of the primary education curriculum and the introduction of participatory teaching methods. It will aim to address the emerging issue of discrimination in access to education through the expansion of the schooling of street children project. Education authorities will be supported in promoting child-to-child learning to develop the creativity and personality of children. Schools will be used as an entry point for child and youth health and life skills education. To ensure that young people's views are taken into greater account, and to promote their interaction, the development of youth assemblies in 12 prefectures and at the central level will be supported.

16. The *protection for children and youth* programme will respond to the special needs and problems of those children most affected by societal changes. The programme will address the rights of children and youth to be secure from violence, exploitation and abuse. Support will be provided for the development of social protection mechanisms for children, youth and women. Programme activities will include support to drop-in centres in urban areas, and the provision of referral and counselling services for emigrants and returnees. Reform of the juvenile justice system will also be supported. The elimination of violence, trafficking, feuding and crime will become main themes of social mobilization and advocacy efforts at the community level.

17. The programme will also focus on the dissemination of healthy lifestyle messages and linking young people with social sector professional caregivers, the media and NGOs. The programme will seek to promote appropriate adolescent lifestyles and health services for young people. Special attention will be given to the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS. This will be complemented by ongoing training in psycho-social counselling for professionals working with children, adolescents and women.

18. The *integrated community services* programme will operationalize the main programme strategies and activities in a targeted manner at the provincial level. The programme will focus on bridging regional disparities through balanced technical support to local health and education structures, capacity-building of local authorities and empowerment of professionals. Integrated community services will provide children, adolescents and women with access to community-based health facilities, as well as to social and legal protection services. The family resource centre project in Shkodra, where social workers provide counselling and support to vulnerable families, will be replicated.

19. Inter-agency cooperation, including with United Nations partners and financial institutions, will be promoted in order to maximize the prospects for child-focused social development. The country programme cycles of UNICEF and the United Nations Development Programme will be harmonized. UNICEF, the United Nations Population Fund, the World Health Organization, the United Nations Office for Project Services and the World Bank will undertake actions in HIV/AIDS prevention, emergency preparedness, basic education, PHC and the reduction of iodine deficiencies, and will conduct a series of collaborative assessments.

Estimated programme budget

Estimated programme cooperation, 2001-2005[a]

(In thousands of United States dollars)

	Regular resources	*Other resources*	*Total*
Early childhood care and development	650	3 000	3 650
Development and participation for children and youth	1 000	3 000	4 000
Protection for children and youth	500	3 000	3 500
Integrated community services	190	4 500	4 690
Cross-sectoral costs	1 000	1 500	2 500
Total	**3 340**	**15 000**	**18 340**

[a] These are indicative figures only which are subject to change once aggregate financial data are finalized.